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Shultz still thinks Yurchenko was real defector, not a plant

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Secretary of State George Shultz said yesterday that U.S. officials remain convinced Vitaly Yurchenko, the supposed prize KGB defector who walked back into Soviet hands, was not a Soviet plant but "defected and, for some reason or another, changed his mind."

"What he said was just a packet of lies," Mr. Shultz said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "He was not kidnapped, he was not drugged or any of those things."

The Central Intelligence Agency has identified Mr. Yurchenko as a "general-designate" of the KGB in an apparent attempt to counter speculation that the Soviet spymaster actually was a low-level plant dispatched by Moscow to disrupt CIA operations.

In an unusual three-page statement released Friday, the CIA described Mr. Yurchenko's relationship with his wife of 27 years as "seriously strained prior to his defection."

The document provides details of Mr. Yurchenko's responsibility for KGB operations in North America, which involved coordinating KGB "work against American citizens." He also coordinated Soviet bloc intelligence operations, ran KGB stations in Ottawa and Montreal, Canada, and selected "agents" in the United States.

Other duties included "selection of agents to be used after the beginning of war and working out agent communications," the CIA statement said.

The White House refused to comment yesterday on a report that President Reagan is considering ordering an investigation into the CIA's handling of the Yurchenko case.

The Los Angeles Times yesterday described Reagan as "upset" over the incident and quoted unnamed sources as saying he is considering an investigation into the case — a review that could embrace the way other defectors have been treated.

Mr. Yurchenko allegedly defected to the United States last summer but walked away from a Georgetown restaurant Nov. 2 and returned to the Soviet Embassy compound several blocks away. Two days later, he appeared at a news conference at the Soviet embassy and said he had been kidnapped and drugged by the CIA.

The newspaper quoted an unnamed administration official as saying, "The people involved will get letters of reprimand, but I wouldn't put this all on the junior people. It's the senior people's fault."

Questions have been raised by members of Congress and intelligence experts about Mr. Yurchenko's seniority in the KGB. When he first came over, intelligence officials had described Mr. Yurchenko as a senior KGB official who may have held the No. 5 post in the KGB. Other intelligence officials have said Mr. Yurchenko's seniority was far lower in the chain of command.

The CIA statement said Mr. Yurchenko was a 25-year veteran of the KGB who most recently was chief counterintelligence officer in the First Chief Directorate (foreign intelligence operations). He directed the Fifth Department of the counterintelligence Directorate K, which investigates espionage by KGB personnel and penetrations by enemy spies.

Mr. Yurchenko would have known many details of KGB agent operations in North America, including agent code-names. It was this KGB division that handled the case of notorious British spies Kim Philby and George Blake, Soviet agents during the 1950s and 1960s, the statement said.

CIA spokeswoman Patti Volz declined to comment on why the paper was released after months of official silence on the matter.

Comparing Mr. Yurchenko to another Soviet KGB defector in Great Britain, Oleg Gordievski, one CIA official remarked two months ago that Mr. Yurchenko "makes Gordievski look like a throwaway." In spy parlance, a throwaway is an agent given away in order to protect more important spies. At the time of his defection, the official said, Mr. Yurchenko exhibited "no abnormalities," such as drinking or emotional problems.

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